

Completed Exhibition List

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George Cooper, Eric Malsander, New York City
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Salaka Rashino, Stanley W. Lee, New York City
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Frederic Lervat, ARI New York, New York City
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Sierra A. Miller, Studio TL, New York City
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Sage, Wimer, Combs Architects, New York City
Susan Wines, Azin Vally, Arch. Inc., New York City
Mary Williams Wolfe, New York City
Abel Yee, Wai-Kong Yee, New York
Mas Yendo, New York City



George Cooper, Eric Malsander,
Proposal for Li, Petrosian Park



Prayer before the Muslims Day Parade, New York, September 1995
Photo by Ed Grazi

november 23 1996 - january 29 1997

NY MASJID

Mosques in New York

STOREFRONT

ART AND ARCHITECTURE
97 KENMARE STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10012, U.S.A.

NEW STOREFRONT

WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING SOME VERY EXCITING PROGRAMMING FOR THE COMING SPRING AND FALL OF 1997.

AMONG THE PROJECTS IN THE DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE IS A HOUSING PROJECT IN THE CITY OF DETROIT. THE GOAL OF THIS PROJECT IS TO CONVERT AN OLD ABANDONED BACKARD MANUFACTURING FACILITY INTO A FACILITY THAT PRODUCES INDUSTRIAL HOMES. THIS PROJECT POSSES A SERIES OF IMPORTANT URBAN AND SOCIAL QUESTIONS: HOW DO WE INSURE THE SURVIVAL OF OUR OF DETERIORATING CITIES WHEN ITS INDUSTRIAL, MANUFACTURING BASED HAS DISAPPEARED? WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF INDUSTRY AND CORPORATION TO THE COMMUNITIES AND CITIES THEY OPERATE IN? STOREFRONT WILL ADDRESS THESE QUESTIONS AND OFFER NEW POSITIONS AND ALTERNATIVES THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PROJECT. WE RECOGNIZE THAT HOUSING ALONE CANNOT SUCCEED IN RE-ENERGIZING AND REJUVENATING DEPRESSED AND FORGOTTEN COMMUNITIES. ALSO AT STOREFRONT, WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF COLLABORATING WITH A YOUNG GROUP OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS. THE IDEA IS TO DEVELOP AN EXHIBITION THAT REVOLVES AROUND THE CONCEPT OF ERGONOMICS. THEY ARE DEVELOPING AN INSTALLATION THAT DEALS WITH THE POSITIONING OF THE BODY IN SPACE RELATIVE TO THE NEW DOMESTIC/ELECTRONIC ENVIRONMENT. THIS INSTALLATION EXAMINES CURRENT SHIFTS IN THE DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENT. IN THE SPRING, STOREFRONT WILL HOST AN EXHIBITION AND SYMPOSIUM FEATURING CONTEMPORARY DUTCH ARCHITECTS, BART LOOTSMA, WIEL ARETS, BEN VAN BERKEL, ADRIAAN GEUZE, KRISTIN FEIREISS, NOUD DE VREEZE, WINY MAAS, JACOB VAN RIJS, NATHALIE DE VRIES, LARS SPUYBROEL, KOEN VAN VELSEN, AND TON VENHOEVEN TO NAME A FEW. THEY WILL DISCUSS SPECIFIC ISSUES OF DUTCH ARCHITECTURE DEALING WITH URBAN HISTORY, THE ASPECTS OF THE SUBURBS, SOCIAL HOUSING PROJECTS, POPULATION GROWTH AND CHANGE IN RELATION TO AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE.

THESE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF THE PROGRAMMING AT STOREFRONT. YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS AND SUPPORT ARE CRUCIAL IN HELPING US BRING THEM TO FRUITION.

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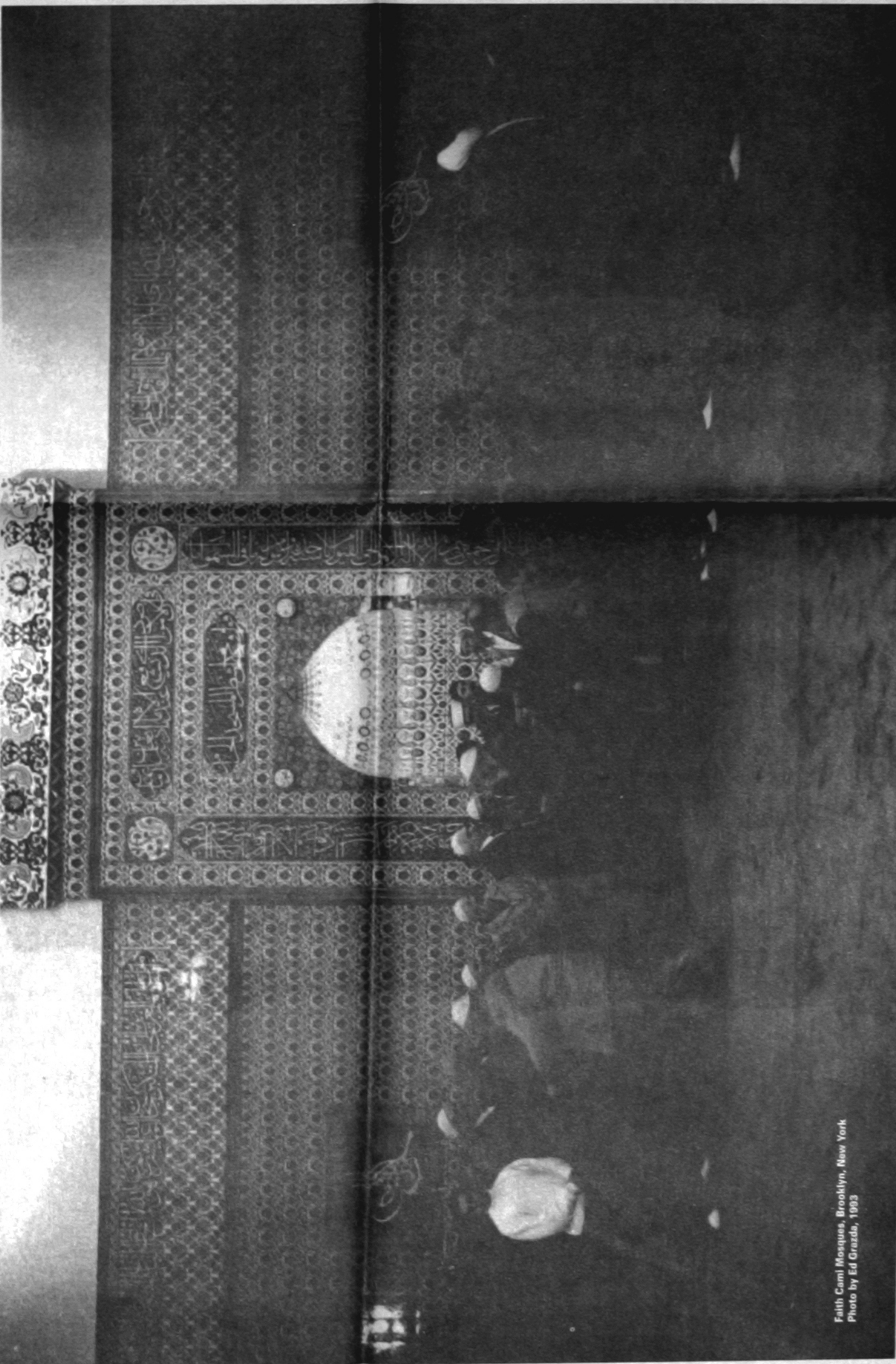
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IN.Y. MASJID: THE MOSQUES OF NEW YORK



Faith Camil Mosque, Brooklyn, New York
Photo by Ed Grazi

Nov 23 1996 - Jan 30 1997
opening reception: november, 23 6-9pm
gallery hours: tues-sat 11-6pm

Project Credit

KHADER HUMIED, Administrative Coordination, Fieldwork and Research
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NY MASJID

NY MASJID is an exhibition aimed at documenting and interpreting the mosques that each of the city's Muslim communities has built at its center. Its goal is to reveal the



Masjid al-Falah, Queens, New York
Photo by Ed Grazda

ways in which these buildings reflect and create identities for Muslims within a dense and diverse urban fabric and to explore the texture and creativity that grow from the tensions that are created within a complex urban environment. We hope in this way to create a document that bears visual witness to a number of cultural minorities whose combined image for Americans is often strung taut between Orientalizing myth and nationalistic polemic.

At the heart of the project is the desire to defuse an isolated and polarized image of Islam as a monolithic other, the remote and mythologized Islam of an opulent palace in Kuwait and of televised videos of the night sky in Iraq. We hope to accomplish this, first, by exploring the diversity of Muslim peoples and Islamic cultures that form part of the city. But we feel the documentation—the interviews, photographs and experiences we have gathered—demonstrates the emergence of an American Muslim architectural identity as well, one that will soon become a significant part of our urban landscape. These are the issues we hope this exhibition will bring forth through the testimony of the builders and users of mosques in the five boroughs, through an analysis of the spaces and images they create for themselves, and through photo documentation of a community occupying and transforming that architecture.

Mosque Foundations in New York

There are over 70 mosques in the five boroughs of New York City, of which no more than a half dozen can be said to have been designed as mosques from the outset. The rest are storefront buildings, lofts, stores or warehouses that have been converted to mosques to serve communities that are the result of the impressive diaspora of the past two decades from dozens of Islamic countries to the United States. New York is the port of entry for the overwhelming majority of these new immigrants, but New York also houses one of the most active indigenous African American Muslim communities, which has been constructing its own mosques since the 1970's.

There is no central administration that coordinates or oversees the mosques of New York; no hierarchy among mosques, no central advisory or governing council. The buildings range in cost and scale from the Islamic Cultural Center—a luminous multi-million dollar domed cube that breaks the grid of third avenue and 96th Street with a rotation towards Mecca—to nameless Mosques carved out of brownstones and warehouses. They embrace a breathtaking ethnic, social and economic diversity. Indeed, one goal of this exhibition is to present the

multiplicity of communities and cultural traditions that are present in the mosques of New York. The congregations of mosques in New York City tend to reflect neighborhood demographics and the second language in which the Khutbah, or Friday sermon, is given. The building of any mosque is accomplished by a lay group, the Shura, a council of congregation members responsible for the financing, and virtually all practical and organizational concerns surrounding the mosque and its decoration. The clergy are on the whole expected to isolate themselves from such material issues, although their participation varies with each community. Since according to Islamic law the purchase, maintenance and upkeep of the building must be financed without paying any interest, the founding of a mosque can represent enormous community effort and sacrifice. Typically, a neighborhood mosque in New

York will be founded by a group of businessmen who have emigrated from a single city or region. That is the case with the Gawsah Jami Masjid in Astoria, Queens, which serves a congregation that is 90% Bangladeshi. Masjid al-Farooq, a Brooklyn mosque administered by a Palestinian Shura houses a congregation that includes a significant percentage of Arab Americans. Another paradigm is provided by the Masjid Malcolm Shabazz, a primarily African American mosque on 116th Street and Lenox avenue that includes in its congregation a growing

and religious values of language and a way of life in an urban environment so rich and visually aggressive that it seems to threaten and absorb those values with its common denominator of secular visual culture.

Social Values and Common Concerns in Architecture

However of significant interest in New York, is the fact that despite the insular nature of many mosque communities, despite enormous ethnic, economic, and social diversity, New York's mosques are linked by social, functional and—surprisingly—important formal issues as well. Each congregation must confront at least two issues common to any ethnic or linguistic group which seeks to practice Islam in the United States: the separation of the sexes during prayer and qiblation (the orientation of prayer in the direction of Mecca). The formal means of separating men from women here takes on particular importance because it is a social and religious custom so imperiled in the images and practice of every day life in New York. At New York's Indonesian mosque, men and women pray in a hall which is split by a line drawn perpendicular to the qibla, placing them equidistant from it, side by side, at the Fath Cami in Brooklyn a movable screen at the back of the prayer hall can expand and contract with the number of women attending. The Islamic cultural center in Manhattan and the new Albanian mosque in Staten Island were designed with elaborate tribunes and balconies, and in a large number of storefront mosques an entire floor is dedicated to women, with a PA system, or, in the case of the more prosperous Bosnian mosque, closed circuit TV. Technology and building funds become the means by which separation can be made more comfortable, but also at times more complete, and more rigidly codified into the architectural structure. For a significant number of the immigrant congregations interviewed, the separation of the sexes had a heightened meaning in an unbridled, secular New York, and the separation was at times defined architecturally in a more restrictive way than in an immigrant's Islamic home country.

Qiblation can be marked in New York with the rotation of an entire building, as in the case of the Islamic Cultural Center of Manhattan or the Masjid al-Falah in Richmond Hill, Queens, or with the rotation of the congregation itself as in Fath Cami or the Masjid al-Farooq in Brooklyn. When it is not accomplished by the rotation of the entire building, qiblation can be indicated by a Mihrab, or prayer niche, or simply by lines drawn along a floor or carpet. While qiblation is common to all mosques in the world, and clearly is meant to reorient worshippers, dislodge them from a familiar, worldly context to better mind the dictates of prayer and the wider community of Islam.



Masjid al-Farooq, Brooklyn, New York
Photo by Ed Grazda

resistant, restrictive aesthetic that binds many mosques of diverse ethnic origins together. In newer and poorer foundations it is often linked with asceticism and architectural austerity. In these foundations an at times complete lack of decoration and an unwillingness to discuss formal choices as part of the purposeful character of a mosque interior converts a paucity of means into an ideological position. In New York City, a world of visual noise gone wild, architectural excess can be aligned with consumerism and secular relativism. For poor communities that flirt with fundamentalist positions, withdrawal from the urban landscape can be a potent, subversive act in a scene in which architecture is part of the secular language of power.

A Nascent Identity

Layered with architectural gestures aimed at creating separate identities through austerity or ethnically distinctive decoration, is another artistic vision, one which seems aimed at creating an identity both American and Muslim. The overwhelming majority of New York mosques have also begun in the past five years to take on a common set of visual forms, forms that mark them and bind them in the urban landscape. Communities from Guyana and Pakistan, Palestine and Iran and African Americans and Sudanese communities have elected to use and reuse a distinctive dome and arch shape—at times architecturally, at times decoratively—that does not relate to the architectural tradition found in most of the home countries of those who adopt it.

The issue of domes and keel arches is a complex one. These are forms which were embedded into the American and European imagination as part of the Colonial discourse: they are coded with sensuality and the carnivalesque, and there is a temptation to interpret them as Orientalist forms. Euro-American representations of Islam as architectural other to the orthogonal cityscape of New York. But to give them a strictly Orientalist interpretation is to rob these gestures of their enormous power to transform the urban landscapes into which they intervene, and to deny the youth and vitality of the social and cultural forces from which their invention springs. These forms have been appropriated over time and invested with new meanings by communities whose experience of being Muslims has required redefinition in a non-Muslim urban landscape. Some domes and arches have taken on a pan-Islamic meaning for immigrant and African American Muslims, who assign a new pan-Islamic meaning to the form now through association of their domes with important monuments from the formation of Islamic architecture: with the Dome of the Rock and Medina. These are the domed buildings that appear on the only floats in New York's Muslim Day Parade: evocations of a community that must be represented by spaces and ideas rather than people and narrative. These are buildings whose history belongs to all Muslims. Perhaps we are witnessing the formation of a new American Mosque architecture, one disengaged from ethnic and national difference, one responding rather to the needs of New York Muslims 'whose links' the community leader Dawd Assad has said 'now supercede national identities'.

Among the many goals of THE MOSQUES OF NEW YORK is to find out, how Muslims use architecture not only to create and reflect, to protect a divergent way of life, but also to create a new identity, that of American Muslim—New York Muslim—through the creation of new architectural forms. How architecture makes a place for all of these activities and meanings: how a community selects and fashions that space according to its means and goals, how that space is perceived by its users and transformed by the activities that occur there: these are the questions we hope to address in NY MASJID.

Jerrilynn D Dodds
School of Architecture, City College of the City University of New York

scongregants often give it an additional meaning in New York City. "We do not pray to Atlantic Avenue" a congregant at Masjid al-Farooq once told me: "we pray to Mecca." Or as a taxi driver from Bangladesh pronounced proudly: "At the Masjid, third Avenue comes to its knees." The notion that New York's urban landscape presents a force that must be defied or held at bay by a mosque building or space is one that appears often in interviews with imams and worshippers. It is at the heart of a

Ed Grazda: Photographer

At the heart of Ed Grazda's work is a tension between cultural distance and intimacy, between our collective temptation to construct an image as exotic and the visual evidence that what seems pleasurably alien is in fact part of a remarkably shared contemporary experience.

In the collection Asia Calling he presented recognizable images of prosaic occupations: of dating and shopping, weddings, and commercial enterprise, in Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. The title cautioned that Ed Grazda was set to challenge the reductive image of a single Asia as East and other, and he accomplished this by bringing us face to face with a technological world and a visual commercial culture within these places which was completely familiar, effortlessly decipherable across continents, across ethnic and religious barriers. In these photographs we are caught constantly between our desire to possess something like the soft, bucolic dream image—rice paddies, rich brocades, eyes averted—from a Singapore Airlines commercial, and the raw witness of struggles, aches, explorations and desires of urban dwellers of Hanoi which match our own.

These meanings are enormously effective in Ed Grazda's work, perhaps above all because he approaches his subjects with considerable humility. His position as subject and observer is readable in the discretion with which he photographs individuals and groups; the physical and psychological distance he maintains. He above all refrains from implicating his own heroic agency through the manufacture or representation of individual dramas. This is even the case in 'Afghanistan (1980-1989)', his photo journal of 10 years spent photographing the Mujahideen during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The work, surprisingly, chronicles the prosaic, mundane, at times meditative quiet of the rebels' lives in a way which invites more recognition, rather than in physical proximity or emotional intensity, that the intimacy and force of Grazda's photos reside.

Recognition can also be seen as a key to Grazda's photographs for NY Masjid. The mosques that serve New Yorkers of widely divergent ethnic, social and economic contexts are spaces set apart from the visual cacophony of an urban fabric conceived by the secular American imagination. Grazda chronicles the interaction of Muslim communities and urban mosques in a style that parallels

the quiet power of community prayer. He explores the interaction with New York City—within a world over which many who are non-Muslims often feel a kind of visual and interpretive hegemony. And yet Grazda sees devout Muslims, at once part of the city, at once discretely, incrementally challenging and transforming its functions, its spaces, its profile. The images are of American Muslims and immigrant Muslims at divergent moments in their communities' assimilation. More even than the earlier work, these photos mark the creativity that surges when visual imaginations coincide and collide. They chart a contemporary world without borders, an urban territory whose landscape is being formed, and remade each day. J.D.



Islamic Cultural Center, Brooklyn, Manhattan, New York, 1994
Photo by Ed Grazda

Biographies

Ed Grazda is a distinguished documentary photographer whose work can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, The Corcoran gallery, The New York Public Library, The Bibliothèque National in Paris, and numerous other collections throughout the United States and Europe. He has photographed widely in Asia and Latin America, and is known most recently for his explorations of cultural representation in the urban 20th century. His book of photographs, *Afghanistan: 1980-1989* (Zurich and New York, 1990), was received with critical acclaim. Among the institutions at which Mr. Grazda has taught photography are Harvard University, and SUNY Purchase.

Jerrilynn Dodds is Professor of Architecture and Theory at the School of Architecture of the City College of the City University of New York. Her work centers primarily on issues of artistic interchange and identity, and the problems surrounding architecture and minorities in pluralistic societies. She is the author of *Architecture and Ideology of Early Medieval Spain* (London and University Park, 1991); *Al Andalus: The Arts of Islamic Spain* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992); and numerous other publications on the subject of Islam, and cultural interchange as seen through architecture. A filmmaker as well as author, Professor Dodds has been writing and filming works concerning the dilemma of Muslims in contemporary society (NY Masjid: The Mosques of New York, and Start Mosq: The Bridge at Mostar [Bosnia]). Among the other institutions at which Professor Dodds has taught are Harvard University, and Columbia University.

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Nov 16, 1996 6-9 pm
at StoreFront



Telepodium Launch Text
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StoreFront in joint cooperation with Pearson Post Industries will host a special screening party of new video work & new digital video technology by Emergency Broadcast Network. StoreFront's facade will be utilized as projection screens for the presentation. EBN's regional manager Gardner Post will be on hand for free demonstrations.

Preview Magazine 3

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3

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